

The Despotica (Part I)

By Michael Kogge; Illustration by Cat Staggs

to Brian, In Eternal Homage
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THE DESPOTICA

(SELECTIONS)
ED. PROFESSOR S.V. SKYNNX

Introduction

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Name-drop "Xim" in any cantina on a thousand disparate worlds and you will either spark the most laconic of Mandalorians into lively conversation or find a banged-up DL-44 triggered at your neural cluster. Few individuals in galactic lore ignite more passion, fascination, and outright hostility than Xim of Argai--or Xim "the Despot" as he's known in the vernacular. His is a name synonymous with the most brutal of tyrants, those once-in-an-epoch mass-murderers who cause the stars to shudder and give religious zealots fodder to substantiate their claims of Evil Incarnate¹.

But the galaxy has experienced thousands of equally detestable despots since Xim's reign some 25,000 years ago, many of whom conquered far larger reaches of spaces and committed far more heinous crimes. Why then are they pushed backstage behind our communal hatred of Xim? Why does Xim devour their sinister legacies like an all-consuming black hole? Why has the terror of Xim's name spread beyond all others to systems he never enslaved and species he never spaced?

Moreover, it would be fraudulent to limit this inquiry to the purview of history. For if Xim truly is one of the most loathed individuals on the galactic record, one must ask why his name usually tops the bestseller lists? Why do publishers invoke the Despot whenever they fall on hard times, pumping out slews of "updated" treasure maps to his long-lost vaults, not to mention sensational



biographies such as *Beloved Xim*, *Our First Despot* or self-improvement guides like *Xim's Rules for Ruling*? Why do tourists keep booking on Ranroon Cruise Lines for a sightseer's package holiday to the locales of Xim's atrocities? Since we despise Xim so much, why can't we all do ourselves a favor and just forget about him?

Show business, any holo fan will tell you, is show business. For even after twenty-five millennia, no one brings down the house quite like the Despot.

Birth of a Blockbuster

Penury has a funny effect on those struggling to make it in the entertainment industry: their prayers to the infernal muse of Xim multiply near debt-collection days. While nothing is a sure thing, trying yet another take on the Despot is a solid bet for "hitting it big" and paying off the most pertinacious skip-tracers. Even a cursory glance at box-office receipts reinforces the prevailing wisdom that audiences never tire of Xim's fabled rise and fall. For years untold, the Argai Players have presented an annual showcase of Lyechusas's trilogies without an empty seat in the house. So ingrained in our collective consciousness is Peshosloc's version of the Third Battle of Vontor that we could lose every copy and re-tell it scene-by-scene a thousand years later. And even assassin droids of the IG series have been observed leaking lubricants when listening to the end of *Evocar* by the Good Hutt Direus'pei.

To the lament of many of my colleagues, truth and verisimilitude are unwonted elements in practically all of these productions. Dramatists seem to go out of their way to eschew historical evidence, since the last thing audiences crave is a reminder of the block period lectures from their Academy days. But give those audiences a Xim who outdoes his own infamy, who lives up to his reputation as the most nefarious villain in the twelve dimensions, and they will flock to the theaters, snap-glue their ears to speaker grilles, even pay top datarie to watch holographic re-cons of his First, Second, and Third Battles.

In this instance, popular opinion may have better served the galaxy. By turning a blind eye to fact and showering Evil Incarnate with their hard-earned credits, audiences have inspired the greatest of all collaborative arts projects, *The Despotica*.

Mythology for the Everybeing

With a printed output spanning the length of an old *Victory*-class destroyer, *The Despotica* is unlike anything in our galaxy.² Its lure of quick riches and fast fame has enticed both celebrated artistes and venerable hacks alike to take their stabs at Xim, generating a variety of contents so unique it requires the editors at *Ronton's Galactic Dictionary* to expand their definition of literature approximately every other year. In its pages one can find everything dreamt under the moons of Iego, including grand librettos and avant-garde performance pieces, puppet show scripts and aural space operas, one-tyrant monologues and modern holo-horror, and occasionally, the brilliant but unproduced holoplay.

Admittedly, most of these contributions are middle-of-the-road in quality, entertaining yet vapid stories dashed off for the easy money. But in the tangleweeds of mediocrity one may discover a glow-pearl of a line, a poem worthy of a Bynarrian jig, or a scene as blood-chillingly tender as anything in the novelettes of Nesslax. With each passing year, the story of Xim only grows in the telling, as eager young dramatists program their auto-styli to meet Peshosloc's challenge: "if holowright desire you be, duel the Despot first you must." It is this motley jumble of the amateur and the masterful—a galactic resistance to a canon of quality—that imparts *The Despotica* with its unrivaled originality and has propelled Xim across the cultural-species divide into the pantheon of universal monsters.

Bad Reputation

Twenty-five millennia of dramaturgical warfare has indeed taken its toll on the Despot: a catalog of sins so diabolical has been ascribed to him that Palpatine seems a saint in contrast. While few in the public would confide to believing every one of Xim's alleged crimes, fewer still seem to care that most of what they know about him is fiction, cooked up by writers starving for the spotlight. Instead, the lasting popularity of *The Despotica* has given our civilization a depository to dump the most inscrutable and unforgivable evils of our past, wherein we make Xim the surrogate for our own demons, and consequently exorcise ourselves of any culpability in those abominable deeds.

"Poor Xim," wrote the former Imperial Laureate, Ebenn Q3 Baobab, "never has so much been slandered of a man about whom so little is known."

Xim the True

Doubtless then will a reader wonder about the despot who existed before *The Despotica*, the Xim of history and not of myth. Such inquiries are more easily pondered than answered. To this day, Xim's origins remain cloaked in mystery and controversy, further muddled by the countless biographies, documentaries, and HoloNews investigative reports that purport to reveal—"at long last"—the true and full story of Xim the Despot. These often rely on tangential bits and threads from *The Despotica* to make their case. Blame should not lay

entirely with their authors; no matter how diligent and objective the historian, it is next to impossible to escape the influence of *The Despotica*, so thoroughly does it inform our historical perspective. The real Xim, whoever he was, lived only a few decades in the long-ago past, while *The Despotica* has captivated our imaginations for millennia.

The scant evidence xenoarchaeologists have unearthed corroborates what is written about him in the ancient chronicles. Xim was born into a family of pirates some 25,000 years ago, probably on the planet Argai. He found such success following the example of his father, Xer, robbing and raiding the spacelanes that he was able to extort exorbitant sums from the merchant guilds in return for leaving their freighters unmolested. He then spent his plunder amassing an armada and army of automatons that eclipsed even the forces of the major trading magnates of the day, the Hutt clans. Once uncontested on all fronts, Xim proclaimed himself the Daritha, Cronese for "Ruler of Worlds," and his ascent to galactic despotism began.

Despot or *Despotica*?

History blurs into hearsay and rumor at this point, with *The Despotica* taking the lead. Its volumes brim with classic box-office bait, tales of torture and mass murder, planetary devastation and colossal carnage. And with a flip of every flimsy page the tempest mushrooms, as subsequent waves of contributors strive to upstage their predecessors in devising new torments their Xim can unleash on the galaxy.

Truth be told, Xim may have been held in high esteem during his lifetime. One achievement that has gone virtually unheralded in the last decade is that scholars have pieced together a smattering of quotes from primary, non-Tionese sources that praise a "bold buccaneer" for standing up to "the Worms." Furthermore, questions remain concerning the actual causes of a planetary disaster on Boonta, known in antiquity as Ko Vari, an outlying Hutt satrapy that Xim is renowned for ravaging after the Hutts disparaged his ambassador. Though astronomical studies show that the planet did suffer a kind of major cataclysm sometime in its past, the Hutts permit no historical probes or archeological digs in or around the Dernatine system, in respect to those Hutts whom Xim supposedly liquefied into radioactive mud. Yet a new study of the planetary atmosphere by the Drall chemist Leeratt suggests that this catastrophe may have occurred well after the time of Xim, upholding stories that the Hutt war-scientist, Boonta, who reconquered the world, had used it as a testing site for centuries of extermination experiments.

Perhaps the fiercest debate revolves around the scope of Xim's power. Some academics concur with the accounts in *The Despotica* that Xim controlled over half of the galaxy at the time, though others maintain that legend overshadows fact, and the Many Thrones of Xim's "empire" consisted merely of what is considered the backwater's backwash, the Tion Hegemony.

A recent expedition in that sector, of which this author played a part, has bolstered the case that Xim was more than just a dread pirate lord. The team acquired artifacts that finally validate the most challenged icon of *The Despotica*: Xim's fearsome war-robots. As yours truly will personally attest, these 'bots are no tin-plated battle droids--the death's head ablaze on their chests more than meets their design.³

Revenge of the Worms

Given the stark contrast between the primary sources and *The Despotica*, the late Sal Ransen of the Obroan Institute has suggested that perhaps Xim was not the malicious tyrant of legend, but rather the victim of vindictive Hutt propaganda. Ransen argues that the Hutts were incensed by Xim's forays into their territories. Prevented from mobilizing their forces because of internecine squabbling, the clans instead waged a war of innuendo, sliming Xim with every conceivable barbarity their vile minds could excrete. "The problem with Hutt slime," Ransen said at the 343rd Conference of Despotism, "is that no matter how hard you rub, their filth just won't come off."

Finding tangible evidence of any sustained propaganda campaign is almost unfeasible, since Hutt culture appears fundamentally opposed to retaining permanent records. But the Hutts do orally keep their own version of history. Ask any Hutt about Xim, and he, she, or it will spit tirades that surpass the most shocking parts of *The Despotica*. According to Hutt lips, Xim ruled like a homicidal lunatic, eliminating anyone who hindered his path to power, demolishing entire civilizations for sheer pleasure, and laying utter waste to lush worlds--like Ko Vari--where many species lived in peaceful harmony with the Hutts.

Sensational atrocities aside, whatever Xim did aeons ago rankled the Hutts so profoundly that they postponed their frivolous feuds and squirmed together under a single banner. Only then did Xim face a legitimate challenge.

Hero of Hutts

During any convocation of the Hutt Council of Elders, a vacant hover-throne floats above the rest, in tribute to General Kossak Inijic Ar'durv, "Devourer of Despots." He remains one of the sole members of his species about whom his brethren will never speak ill. While Xim profanes, Kossak's name binds the most sacred of clan oaths. His statuette decorates many a paddy frog tank; whole star skiffs have been forged in his image. His strategies of sabotage and subterfuge are practiced by Huttlets and clans leaders alike, and are believed to have inspired Budhila Hestilic Amura's kajidic philosophy. On Nal Hutta, adoring supplicants go so far as to polish his giant bronze bust with their own ooze. For a species repulsed by hero-worship, the Hutts have made Kossak "the Mighty" their great exception.

Kossak's veneration comes well-deserved. He achieved that most unlikely of feats: uniting the Hutt clans. He did so by renouncing the usual boss-man retinue, traveling by means of his own tail, and guaranteeing each clan leader that he would expand their base of power if they pledged their complete support to defeat Xim the Despot. Salivating at the prospect of profit, the largest clans agreed, while the smaller ones joined soon after so as not to be left out.

Wise Investments

Once installed as Clan-General at the first Conclave of Worms, Kossak drew ire when he expropriated all the Hutt treasure hoards and outlawed expenditure on anything other than war materiel and provisions. But when it was clear that Kossak stuck to his word--perhaps a singular occurrence in Hutt history--and did not purchase luxury entitlements for himself, the tenuous peace between the clans held. Further apprehension ceased when, after an initial depletion of funds to step-up naval construction, the treasury grew three-fold from booty snatched during the war and the general promised to pay back the "loans" using this surplus as interest.

Kossak's primary strategy in his epic war against Xim was to turn the pirate's tactics against him. The Hutt general hired thousands of Weequay mercenaries to pillage the shipping lanes and shake down any commercial enterprise not in league with the Hutts. Xim was forced to spread out his navy among the very merchants he once had terrorized, which thinned major convoys and made for easy targets. Lacking sufficient protection, Xim's allies gradually jumped ship for the Hutt cause, facilitated by Kossak's sweet bribes.

His armada dwindling, Xim sought to protect his battleships in the same manner of his war-robots. Employing techniques the Hutts had yet to master, his shipwrights forged dreadnaught hulls speckled with a special ore called kiirium that would reflect laser beams. But the ore was a most precious supply at the time, since the Kiirium Reaches had been mined and exhausted of their namesake. So Xim and his men were always looking for more kiirium--until Kossak stupidly challenged Xim to ritual combat at the world of Vontor, deep in the savage Si'Klaata Cluster. Stupid it seemed, at the time, because the Hutts thought Vontor to be a barren rock suitable only as a staging ground for these ritual matches, apparently unaware that its very soil possessed the richest of all kiirium ores.

Yes, Xim would be an honorable Daritha and slay the slow-witted Worm at his place of choosing. But not before a quick scoop of Vontor's soil provided him shielding for his entire starfleet and thus the means to assert total control over the galaxy.

Kossak's Trap

The Hutts might not have been able to extract kiirium from the Vontorian dirt, but they were well acquainted with the strain's unique properties, having organized many combats on its surface. Vontorian kiirium did not merely reflect lasers; it refocused them into a sheen that could blind.

Just as a Hutt would never turn tail from the scent of a spice mine, Kossak gambled that Xim would be unable to resist the lure of a kiirium-laden world. After issuing his combat challenger, he surreptitiously channeled the planetary coordinates to Xim's spies in advance, and weakened its defense to a single Weequay garrison. If he could trick Xim into bringing his fleet to orbit the world, he could hijack the primitive beacon network surrounding it, cut off escape routes, and destroy the Despot for good, even with a much smaller force.

One...

Arriving weeks before Kossak, Xim crushed the Weequay garrison without losing a single soldier. Emboldened, he summoned the rest of his armada to Vontor. He then dispatched scouts to make forays on worlds close-by while his automatons mined the kiirium ore and fastened plates onto every hull he had. It was only when he ordered the fleet to combat readiness did he realize his blunder: the living pilots under his command had difficulty keeping formations due to the intense reflective sheen of this strain of kiirium, and even rigorous training did not do much to overcome the limitations of the organic eye.

Kossak arrived at the appointed time to find Xim's engineers in a panic, trying to strip off the kiirium plates from the ships. So Kossak threw every tarrada cruiser and batil fighter he could muster against the Despot's navy, instructing them to forgo basic targeting and just light-up the stars. Xim's pilots, flying "blind" in this laser show, did the rest of the damage themselves. In one Vontorian afternoon, Xim lost most of his armada, including his flagship, the Eibon Scimitar, primarily from friendly fire.

...Two...

Xim fled with whatever his engineers salvaged, swearing never to put his faith in living beings again. He rounded up the remaining units of his fleet and is rumored to have jettisoned most of his "dead organic weight," replacing his crews with war-robots. Then, according to the Hutts, he marauded worlds of the Cluster to recoup resources for a vengeful strike on Vontor. And because he wanted Kossak to bear the brunt of the beating he would inflict, Xim dared the Hutt to a second ritual combat.

Kossak was caught off-guard at the request. Such a challenge was unprecedented in Hutt history: never had an individual of another species openly invoked the Hutt rituals. Rematches themselves were rare, since the loser usually slithered away to suck on his own slime. Yet if

Kossak did not accept the Daritha's invitation, he would lose face not only with his fellow Hutts--some of whom he knew desired his command--but also the galactic community at large.

Stationed at Vontor with the mightier force, Kossak was determined to wipe Xim from the annals of history. Kossak's army laid a death blow to the last (and best) of Xim's biological troops, the Duinarbulon Star Lancers, in a massive surface engagement. But the Star Lancers also inflicted massive casualties on Kossak's Cyborrean, Jilruan, and Weequay mercenaries, knowing all along they were sacrificing themselves for the greater glory of the Daritha. As the troops fought to the last against overwhelming odds, Xim's war-robots mined the planet for kiirium. Kossak had just declared victory when he noticed Xim's ships shooting from the poles, every one of them plated in kiirium. The Hutt general employed the same tactics that won him the First Battle, not anticipating the versatility of Xim's automatons. The mechanicals did not experience the side-effect of blinding as organic entities and had no trouble calculating the trajectory and turbolaser adjustments necessary for combat in space. The Second Battle ended when Xim blasted through Kossak's fleet, making off with a valuable haul of Vontorian kiirium.

Final Preparations

Back on Chandaar, Xim ignored the advice of his counselors to secure his empire and allow the Hutts to retake the worlds on the periphery of theirs, such as Ko Vari. He feared that they soon would develop the technology to smelt kiirium into a usable armor and thus exploit Vontor. Consequently, he believed he had no choice but to sink every last coin of the Dellalt vaults into kiirium armor and war-bot construction, so as to stamp out these gastropodic vermin once and for all.

Kossak aslo needed to rebuild his army after suffering severe losses in the battle with the Star Lancers. Seeking a new species to enlist in the cause against the Despot, he sent his three most trusted emissaries to the worlds Xim had sacked in the Si'Klaata Cluster. His first-spawn, Dojundo, went to Vodran, where its primitives were rebuilding their thatched huts after rains of Xim's fire. Axkatta, the general's crafty financial planner, wandered the Derelkoos desert of Klatooine to rally the Children of the Fountain who had survived Xim's war-robot assault. Kossak's entrepreneurial aunt, Churabba, approached Kintan differently: she reduced the stronghold of the M'dweshuu Cult into a pile of rubble, which freed the Nikto people from their oppressive theocrats. In awe of these demigods who descended from the heavens in fiery chariots, the natives of the Si'Klaata Cluster vowed to fight the accursed Xim on the pledge that the Hutts would teach them the secrets of their star-magic.⁴

...Three

No invitation was needed for the third ritual combat. Five years to the day of the first battle, Xim and Kossak came to a head one final time at Vontor, in a conflagration the Klatooinian skald Pupaku deemed had no equal in ruin, death, or heroism. His oft-printed memorial to the Third Battle of Vontor logs its duration at more than 900 Vontorian spins (or about two-and-a-half Standard years) and tallies its participants, after multiple reinforcements, to have comprised of almost a quarter of the species and automatons in the galaxy. On numbers alone, few battles in history rival that of the Third.

But Pupaku is not quoted for his skill in accounting. His elegies to his Nikto, Weequay, Vodran, and Klatooinian brothers-in-arms are among the most moving tributes to fallen soldiers ever composed. Facing a reputedly invincible army of kiirium-clad war-robots, the warriors of the Si'Klaata Cluster jacked themselves up on spice and never buckled when death's head came for them. They lured the machines into the Vontor underground, destroying and disabling them, one-by-one, as they themselves perished. Their sacrifice, Pupaku opines, is what turned the tide of the Battle and Xim's flesh-and-blood lieutenants to the Hutt side. For the first time, these minions saw that their Despot could be defeated--and thus his Empire could be theirs. Blessed by Kossak, the lieutenants staged a mutiny against their warlord Xim, marking the Third Battle of Vontor the end of his reign.

WAR BETWEEN THE GODS
STEWES THE SEA OF STARS,
AND MAKES THE DARKNESS VISIBLE:
WHILE BENEATH COLD STONE,
MEN OF BLOOD, MEN OF METAL,
CLOSE THEIR EYES, TRAIN THEIR EARS
TO KILL TO KILL TO KILL
AND BLAZE THEIR LIGHT
TO SAVE THEIR BROTHERS.

— FROM PUPAKU'S *THE THIRD BATTLE*



Post-Vontor

Whether Pupaku's descriptions are mere war-boasts or honest portrayals of the conflict, historians have never been able to confirm. Vontor remains, as it has since the Third Battle, a closed system. The Hutts also restrict access to other potential skirmish sites in the Si'Klaata Cluster, granting entry only to those scholars who defend their version of the war. Unless the Hutts are purposely concealing something, their reasoning is anyone's conjecture, as no one yet has cracked a Hutt mind.

To complicate matters, the Council of Elders has declared that any artifact from the era must be turned over to the Elders, and those caught smuggling said contraband will have their fate meted out as an "enemy of the species." Though the Qulappa clan has seemingly defied this rule when they ferried Xim's "sole-surviving" floating fortress to Boonta for visitors (of the paying kind), its authenticity is much in doubt. ⁵ Shortly before his untimely death in the Oseon, Professor Sal Ransen made a big stink on *TriNebulon Tonight* by charging that the fortress was nothing short of a flat-out fake, remarking "there's a Hutt scheme for every billion suckers."

Most of my colleagues do not share Ransen's outspokenness against Hutts, and rather cling, as they have for millennia, to the false hope that one day the Hutts will open their spacelanes so a more complete record of the Xim-Hutt conflict can be constructed. But I will be as forthright as I can before my chroma-wings sprout: if history has taught us anything at all, it's that Hutts never change. Those who want to learn the truth about Xim's war with the Hutts will have to do more than contrive telescopic surveys from afar or barrage the clans with permission requests greased by university endowments. They must leave the leisure of their armchairs, turn down the chummy conference circuit, and hunt out a down-on-his-luck daredevil with a semi-feral first mate. Then, in the name of scholarship, they must hazard excursions into the most guarded sectors of Hutt Space, where untold peril awaits. This will sound like courting a sure death to most, except for the brave few who cannot live without the truth. For my own humble researches have taught me that truth-seeking is not a career, it is a vocation; and to be its disciple one must heed its call the call to Adventure.

Death of the Despot

Just as Xim's life befuddles historical corroboration, so does his end -- and *The Despotica* invites a galaxy of possibilities. Basel of Tion and the holowright of holowrights himself, Peshosloc, both have Xim, in their versions, perishing after the Third Battle. Direus'pei, on the other hand, keeps Xim alive, shackled in the dungeons of Evocar, which did not fall under Hutt control until 10,000 years after Xim's time. Then there are the sacred punch-cards of the Yaled prophet ZIMM, who claims to have hooked up his organic counterpart to a mind probe and transferred all of the Despot's memories into the prophet's own VerboBrain. Numerous are the other endings that pit the Daritha and the Devourer against each other in a duel to the death, freeze Xim to be a palace ornament on Varl, or have the Despot descend into the bowels of the Maw, vowing Eternal Revenge.

It seems a terrible fate to be doomed to die in every despicable manner for a litany of crimes no one individual could ever commit. Yet perhaps Xim wished it this way; perhaps he foresaw what his legend could become when he contracted Lychusas to pen her trilogies. The inscription above the Dellalt vaults mirrors his aspirations for apotheosis: "In Eternal Homage to Xim, Whose Fist Shall Enclose the Stars and Whose Name Shall Outlive Time." Maybe Xim recognized that only in fiction could he achieve the immortality he so desired. If that is the case, he must have laughed all the way to the grave.

Editor's Note

To connoisseurs of literature who come across these pages, please forgive the renderings of these selections. In order to keep the cost of the Reader affordable, I have chosen the highest quality translations available in the universal domain. The original sources are, of course, the best way to experience the beauty and power of these writers.

And dear students of history, both armchair and professional, fret not over major anachronisms or technological inaccuracies you will uncover in these stories. Bury the millennial-old debate whether sleeper ships, jump-gates, or a hyperbeacon network supplied the

primary means of star travel during Xim's era, or whether beam-tubes, particle dischargers, and pulse-cannons were the actual armaments. Only know that the Xim of *The Despotica* is the real Xim, the true Xim -- our Xim -- the Despot we all have loved to hate. Without these volumes, without the wild imaginings his myth inspired, Xim might be just a footnote, a Faarl, yet another conqueror in the chronicles -- and we historians would have much less intriguing mysteries to unravel.

1: A sampling of contemporary cultures reveals how deep Xim's ignominy penetrates. Livien law mandates one spit whenever the name is spoken. "Eater of Tongues" is the Cronese translation of his name, and has become a term applied to those who have spoken treason against the Kingdom or its cherished Code. In Huttese, there is no fouler curse: *xim* refers to the rancor droppings an ascendant Huttlet spreads over the corpse of the clan leader he overthrows ("to speed up the rot," Hutt sages advise). Rare are those societies, such as the Mandalorians, who remain open-minded about Xim and his autocratic methods. Apart from the Tionese, only the cyborgs of Yaled IV hold Xim in absolute reverence, though xenoarcheologists dispute whether their war-robot deity ZIMM has any true relation to the pre-Republic despot. Positive or negative denotations aside, the Despot's name pervades lexicon after lexicon, statistically on par with droid, caf, and skloob (see A. Nepā, *Beyond Basic: Eleven Words that Unite a Galaxy*). So heed this warning, dear reader: if ever you name-drop Xim, be mindful of the company you keep -- and gear up for a quickdraw.

2: 93,886 volumes as of the third edition of this reader.

3: The author of this introduction wishes to express his perpetual gratitude to another holo-legend, the audacious Han Solo, who assisted in locating Xim's fabled treasure. Much to Solo's regret, the treasure provided little in the way of pecuniary reward, but for Ximologists everywhere, its trove of kiirium ingots, mytag crystals, beamtubes, and antique automatons is priceless. (See *Han Solo and the Lost Legacy: A True Story of the Scoundrel and a Scholar*, by S.V. Skynx, University of Rudrig Press.)

4: Twenty-five thousand years later, their service continues.

5: In his groundbreaking study, *Iconography in the Age of Xim*, Arhul Hextrophon states that while the floating fortress's design corresponds with the style of other Expansionist-era architecture, the materials behind its construction appear to be of more recent Nikto manufacture. Since the book's publication, the Hutts have issued a moratorium on all university personnel from touring "Xim's" station.

Playwright and screenwriter Michael Kogge resides in Los Angeles. WGBH-Boston commissioned his latest film, the PBS documentary "My Best Friend for Congress", for the 2008 U.S. presidential election. His essays on the films of Billy Wilder, Stanley Kubrick, and William Friedkin appear in the forthcoming *George Lucas's Blockbusting*, published by HarperCollins. He has been rumored to lurk at www.mikekogge.com.

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